The Australian Centre and the Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne
Literary Awards 2013
Judges’ Reports

PETER BLAZEY FELLOWSHIP
$15,000 (approx.) award to further a work in progress in biography, autobiography or life-writing

WINNERS
Michael Farrell for The Case of Jong Ah Sing
Mark Mordue for Tender Prey: The Life and Times of Nick Cave

COMMENDED
Elmo Keep for The Two Fathers

Two submissions stood out in terms of literary merit and the treatment of their subjects. The first was Michael Farrell’s The Case of Jong Ah Sing, a biographical study of a Chinese gold miner in colonial Victoria who was incarcerated in Yarra Bend Asylum in 1867, remaining there for over thirty years, until his death. Jong Ah Sing wrote a diary while in the asylum, and Farrell’s study uses this to pursue a range of fascinating questions about Chinese life in Australia during this time, and to think about a very particular, challenging kind of colonial literary expression. Farrell brings a poet’s perspective to Jong Ah Sing, drawing this obscure figure into the open and making him resonate with contemporary readers.

The second was an extract from Mark Mordue’s Tender Prey, a biography of the musician and singer, Nick Cave. Mordue’s work carefully probes the life and times of this seminal Australian figure, giving a vivid account of his early life as a child growing up in Wangaratta in the 1960s. A wide range of local sources add depth and perspective – and new information – about Cave that readers will very much enjoy. This is a lively, evocative biography that expertly situates this influential musician in a framework of country living, family networks and local institutions.

Commendation is given to Elmo Keep for her submission from The Two Fathers, a compelling and evocative memoir that looked at a daughter’s growing, piecemeal awareness of some hidden aspects of her father’s remarkable life.

JUDGES
Ms Penny Blazey, Professor Ken Gelder, Dr Jeff Sparrow, A/Professor Denise Varney